

WANDSWORTH COUNCIL
FAMILY AND FRIENDS CARE POLICY
2012

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Introduction

The Statutory Guidance for Local Authorities, Family and Friends Care published in 2011 makes it a requirement for each local authority with responsibility for children's services to publish, in collaboration with local partners, a policy setting out its approach towards promoting and supporting the needs of children living with family and friends carers, whether or not they are Looked After Children. Looked After is the technical term to describe children who are in the care of the Local Authority.

Family and Friends carers have said that they are often uncertain as to what help is available and how to access services. This policy will help family and friends carers and anyone in contact with them to understand the type of arrangements they are undertaking, the duties and responsibilities involved in these care arrangements, the types of services available and where to go for further information.

Purpose of the policy

The aim of the policy is to ensure that, where parents are unable to care for their children, family and friends carers receive the support they require to meet the needs of the children they are caring for.

The purpose of this document is to provide guidance and information on how Wandsworth Council in collaboration with its partners and local services supports the placement of children with their family (relatives) and friends. These arrangements can be made informally by parents, family and friends or, more formally by parents and family and friends with the Council for children who are looked after.

Scope of the policy

When there is a crisis in the family, family and friends often rally round to make sure the children are cared for, and often make arrangements between themselves to look after children until the crisis has passed. Mothers, and most fathers, have parental responsibility which gives them the authority to make such private arrangements. Wandsworth Council only becomes involved if there are welfare or protection issues with which the family needs support or intervention; if the arrangement falls within the definition of private fostering; or if the child is or becomes Looked After.

The policy comprises two parts which cover:

1. Informal/private arrangements for Children in Need - the placement of children by parents with their family/relatives and friends when these arrangements are for Children in Need; and

2. Public arrangements for Children who are Looked After - the placement of children who are Looked After with their family/relatives and friends.

Context

Family and friends play a unique role in enabling children and young people to remain with people who they know and trust if they cannot, for whatever reason, live with their parents. Many children who live in family and friends care do well in life, but others are vulnerable and are failing to achieve good outcomes. Many family and friends carers both want and need support to enable them to meet the needs of the children they care for. Each case will bring different challenges but research evidence tells us that family and friends care can bring stability to children and enhance their behavioural development and emotional wellbeing.

Statement of values, principles and objectives

The council recognises the vital contribution family members and friends make in providing care for children. The great majority of children living with families and friends do well and prosper without the intervention of the council. There are occasions where assistance may be requested or is required to support family and friends who care for children who are unable to live with their parents. This policy clarifies how that support is assessed as needed, will be arranged and provided.

This policy is based on principles which are described below:

- The child's welfare and safety is paramount;
- Children are best Looked After within their families, with their parents playing a full part in their lives, unless this is not compatible with the safety and welfare of the children;
- Children should only become Looked After if there is no other way to safeguard them or promote their welfare;
- The aim should always be to assist families in resolving their problems which would enable them to be reunited. If this is not possible then children should be found permanent stable placements with family, friends, or alternative families close to home;
- Parents should be expected and enabled to retain their responsibilities and to remain as closely involved as is consistent with the child's welfare, even if that child is living away from home either temporarily or permanently;
- If children have to live apart from their family, their parents and carers will be given adequate information and support to enable them to make an informed choice about the most appropriate form of care;

- Continuity of relationships is important and attachments should be respected, sustained, and developed; and
- All children need to develop their own identity, including self- confidence and a sense of self-worth.

1) Private/informal arrangements for Children in Need

Aim and Definition

The department's aim is to ensure that family and friends carers receive the support they need to meet the needs of the children they are caring for. Private/informal family and friends care arrangements are defined as arrangements made by birth parents for the full time care, nurture and protection of their children, living apart from them with their family or friends (now also known as connected persons in the revised Care Planning Regulations 2010). With few exceptions, parental responsibility will remain with the birth parents but with day to day parenting tasks and decisions delegated to the carers.

Most informal arrangements work well and will not come to the attention of the Council. In some cases the Council may be involved with providing a service to these children and families and monitor the arrangements that fall under private fostering regulations;

- Children placed with close relatives (as defined by Children Act 1989) by parents at the parents' own initiative;
- Children placed with close relatives (as defined by Children Act 1989) by parents with the arrangements facilitated by and with the support of the council e.g. as an agreed safeguarding measure;
- Young people aged 16+ (some exceptional circumstances apply) who are living with a relative by their own choice;
- Children and young people placed with friends or non close relatives (as defined by Children Act 1989) by parents for a period of less than 28 days; and
- Children placed by parents for over 28 days with friends or non close relatives (as defined by Children Act 1989) under Private Fostering regulations.

Early identification and support

The majority of private/informal arrangements work well and meet the needs of the child with the support of universal agencies such as Health and Education services. It is important, however, that any difficulties are responded to early. Partner agencies have a key role to play in identifying and supporting children who are living with family and friends carers. Services

need to be aware of and sensitive to the needs of these children and their families.

To enable family and friends to offer appropriate care for children and young people who cannot live with their parents, access to a range of high quality universal and targeted services will be needed. It is Wandsworth's policy to take a multi agency approach to delivering services to children and young people in the borough. The Wandsworth Children and Young People's Partnership (WCYPP) is a multi agency forum of senior representatives including Health, Police, Probation, Youth Offending Team, Schools/Colleges as well as the Voluntary and Community Sectors. Support services are available for all children regardless of whether they are living with birth parents, or with family and friends carers. For all children early intervention, underpinned by the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) and Think Family, will help prevent difficulties escalating to the point where specialist services are required.

Our approach

Research has identified that family and friends carers can enhance the behaviour, development, mental health and placement stability of children but that attention must be paid to ensuring families have the right levels of support.

In implementing this policy Wandsworth Council aims to narrow the gap in outcome between children placed in family and friends care from disadvantaged backgrounds and their peers by the provision of effective inter-agency support and by working with our local partners in Health, Housing and Education. Wandsworth Council has a corporate responsibility to ensure that local services are effective and accessible. Family and friends carers will be signposted to local services and the Family Information Service. Where children and family and friend carers are supported by the Common Assessment Framework or Child in Need planning process, local resources will be identified and accessed.

Wandsworth Council recognises that most private/informal arrangements work well to meet the needs of the child and that with the provision of support at the earliest opportunity; there will be no requirement for Council intervention. The Council will only assess informal/private family and friends care arrangements when it is necessary to safeguard and promote the welfare of the child, or where the council is obliged to meet the requirements of private fostering regulations. No child should have to become a Looked After Child in order to access support when cared for by family or a friend.

There will be some circumstances where, in the child's best interests, a private arrangement by the parents is facilitated by the council as a safe alternative to the child becoming Looked After. In these cases the child may be subject of a child in need plan or, where appropriate, a child protection plan. This will ensure the coordinated provision of support to meet the child's

needs, that the arrangements are still in the best interests of the child, and that the child's need for permanence is being met.

The Legal Framework

The following legislation and guidance provide the legal basis for departmental involvement in private/informal/ family and friends care arrangements:

- The Children Act 1989;
- The Children and Young Person Act 2008;
- The Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations Volume 2: Care Planning, Placement and Case review;
- Family and Friends Care: Statutory Guidance for Local Authorities; and
- The Children (Private Arrangements for Fostering) Regulations 2005

Accountability

Where the arrangements have been made by families without Wandsworth Council involvement, parental responsibility remains with the birth parents but with day to day parenting tasks and decisions usually delegated to the family and friends carers.

Where Wandsworth Council has been involved in setting up or supporting the arrangements, it is essential that all parties have a clear understanding of the status of the arrangements. In these circumstances the child is a Child in Need and does not become Looked After. Ultimately it is the birth parents who have the responsibility for making and adhering to these arrangements. The birth parents retain and will continue to exercise Parental Responsibility with agreement reached as to the day to day parenting tasks delegated to the carers and the decisions they can take. The suitability of the arrangements to meet the child's needs and the range of support, including any financial support to meet the child's needs, will be reviewed via the child in need or child protection procedures..

Family Group Conferences

Wandsworth Council promotes the use of Family Group Conferences as a process for helping families in planning for children in complex situations.

When circumstances arise which require a plan to be drawn up, the child's social worker may seek agreement to commission Welcare, an independent voluntary organisation, to facilitate a meeting of family members and other connected persons. The purpose of the meeting is for the family to agree a plan for the child and to consider what assistance might be needed for the plan to work. The Council will agree the plan with the family provided it is

considered to be in the child's best interest and does not place the child at risk of significant harm.

Assessment and Support

Wandsworth Council will only assess private/informal family and friends care arrangements when it appears to the council that it is necessary to do so in order to safeguard and promote the welfare of the child, or if it constitutes a private fostering arrangement.

There will be circumstances when Wandsworth Council will facilitate arrangements for the parents to arrange for relatives or friends to care for a child in order to prevent the child from becoming Looked After. This may be in response to a crisis in the parental home which makes it unsafe for the child to remain with his/her parents in the short term e.g. during a section 47 enquiry. The suitability of these arrangements will need to be agreed by the Service Manager following appropriate assessment.

Professional judgement is required to assess a child's safeguarding needs. The child may need to be Looked After if some or all of the following circumstances apply; this list is not exhaustive and other factors maybe relevant. Each case must be assessed on its own facts:

- Birth parents may not agree, or may be inconsistent as to their agreement for the child being cared for by family and friends carers;
- There is concern that the child's placement with family or friends carers may be seriously disrupted by a birth parent, whose behaviour may have been assessed as posing a significant risk;
- Court orders are in place which makes managing contact difficult;
- A birth parent may be untraceable, or incapable of giving agreement to the child being cared for by family/friends carers; and
- If the Council assesses that it needs to share parental responsibility with the birth parent/s in order to promote and safeguard the child's welfare and secure the placement the child may need to become Looked After. Legal advice may be appropriate to assist with the decision, including whether it should be a voluntary arrangement under Section 20 or whether care proceedings should be commenced. Before they are asked to make or when they make a commitment to a child, carers should be provided with clear information about the level of support they will receive and for how long and the legal framework under which the arrangement is made. It is acknowledged that private arrangements may be made in an emergency, with little or no planning of the placement involved, so it is vital that appropriate/timely assessments and plans are made.

When Wandsworth Council supports private/informal arrangements made by parents, the child will be treated as a child in need and appropriate assessments will be made under the Framework for Assessment for Children in Need and their Families to inform a Child in Need plan or Child Protection plan if required.

The assessment will explore whether care for the child can be safely provided by a relative or friend, the suitability of these arrangements and if this is the most appropriate legal status for these arrangements. If required the Child in Need plan will agree the practical and other support, including any financial support, to be provided for the child, to the child's carer and the role and responsibility of the child's parents.

This is particularly important, as neither the carer nor Wandsworth Council has parental responsibility for the child in these circumstances, since no court orders have been made conferring it. The carer may do what is reasonable to safeguard and promote the child's welfare (s.3 (5) Children Act 1989) but should be supported to refer back to the parent or other person with parental responsibility about significant decisions.

It is acknowledged that many of these arrangements will be temporary and short term but, if the arrangement continues, plans need to be made to secure permanence for the child and prevent drift. Carers may be given advice and guidance on applying for Residence Orders or Special Guardianship Orders under Private Law.

Financial Support

Under informal arrangements where the Council has not been involved, the parents will always be expected to make appropriate financial arrangements with the carer to enable them to care for the child.

Where the Council has been involved in setting up the arrangements following assessment, the department may make exceptional payments under section 17 of the Children Act 1989 to support a child's placement with relatives or friends to promote their best interests and prevent the child becoming Looked After.

Parents will always be expected to make appropriate financial arrangements with the carer to enable the carer to care for the child. However, if a child's needs cannot be met by a family member or friend without financial support in the short term, Wandsworth Council may, with the agreement of the parents, provide limited financial support to the placement under Section 17 (Children Act 1989) rather than accommodate the child under Section 20 so long as this is consistent with the child's welfare.

Before they are asked to make or when they make a commitment to a child, carers should be provided with clear information about the level of support, including any financial assistance that they will be offered. This will include how finances have been or will be calculated and how long this support will

last. Carers, who may, for example, have to give up their job to care for the child(ren) will then be able to make an informed choice about whether the placement is feasible for them to enter into.

Under these circumstances, financial support under Section 17 could range from a one off payment to the provision of an agreed level of financial support – subject to assessment, which will be regularly monitored and reviewed. In the process of making decision about the funding of arrangements under Section 17 the department will have regard to the following criteria:-

- Financial assistance is required to meet the child or young person's needs and to promote and safeguard his/her welfare;
- Wandsworth Council would have to accommodate the child/young person under Section 20 of the Children Act if no financial assistance was provided and there is clear evidence that the child's needs are likely to be best met without the provision of accommodation under this Section; and
- No persons with parental authority are able to fund the placement and the placement cannot be funded by recourse to the national benefits system.

This payment can be a single payment or a series of payments on a time limited basis.

Private fostering arrangements

There will be circumstances when private/informal arrangements made by parents constitute private fostering arrangements. Wandsworth Council holds statutory responsibilities as a Local Authority in relation to private fostering arrangements. Privately fostered children and young people are a diverse group and come from a large variety of backgrounds and circumstances. All professionals should take into account the specific needs of each privately fostered child/ young person including all issues of diversity.

Legal definition of a Privately Fostered Child

A child under the age of 16 (under 18, if disabled) who is cared for, or proposed to be cared for, and provided with accommodation by someone other than:

- A parent;
- A person who is not a parent but has Parental Responsibility; and
- A close relative, i.e. aunt/uncle/step-parent/grand-parent/sibling but not a cousin or great aunt/uncle.

and is:

- Cared for and accommodated by that person for 28 days or more, or the period of actual fostering is less than 28 days but the private foster carer intends to foster him/her for more than 28 days;
- The arrangement is seen as private fostering if it meets the criteria above whether for reward (monetary or otherwise) or not; and
- A child is not privately fostered if the person caring for him/her had done so for a period of less than 28 days and does not intend to do so for any longer period.

Parents, carers and partner agencies have a duty to notify Wandsworth Council about private fostering arrangements and Wandsworth Council has a duty to satisfy itself that the welfare of privately fostered children in its area is being safeguarded and promoted. It will assess the suitability of the placement and visit the child in a private foster home in line with regulations to ensure the child is safe and well. Parents and carers involved in the arrangement will be given information and offered professional advice and support.

Accommodation

Family and friends carers may need support with accommodation as their home may not be of sufficient capacity to suddenly take on the long term care of a child or a sibling group. Wandsworth Council will assist family and friend carers who come forward to obtain information and advice on how to access suitable accommodation in view of their changed circumstance.

Family and Friends carers living in social housing will be supported to make an application for a priority managed move to the Housing Department if this is required to promote the welfare of children and avoid a need for them to be Looked After.

Advice and Information

Family and friends carers may take on a caring role in an emergency or at a stage in their lives when they are not aware of local support services for children and families. They will be given information to assist them in their caring role and about what resources are available in their local area such as early year's provision, day care, out of school services, colleges, health services leisure and youth support services. They will also be advised of specialist services for children with special educational or mental health needs such as the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS).

2) Public Arrangements for Children who are Looked After

Aim and definition

Children become 'Looked After' when their birth parents or someone else who has parental responsibility are unable to provide ongoing care in either a temporary or permanent capacity. Children can either be 'Looked After' as a result of voluntary agreement by their parents or as a result of a care order. When children need to be looked after family and friends often come forward or are identified as potential carers. This might happen in the following circumstances on either a planned or emergency basis:

- Where Wandsworth Council has initiated care proceedings and placed or plans to place the child under an interim or full care order;
- Where Wandsworth Council has accommodated the child under section 20 of the Children Act 1989 with the family or friends by agreement with birth parents;
- Where the child is already placed with approved foster carers or is in a regulated placement and Wandsworth Council is assessing the potential family and friend carers as interim or longer term carers for the child; and
- Where the Looked After Child or young person (usually a teenager) decides of their own volition to live with a family or friend and expresses a wish to remain.

Where a child is Looked After and where it is in their best interests, and it is the most appropriate placement, Wandsworth Council will ensure that they will give preference to a member of the family/relative, or friend (connected person) as the placement of choice for the child. It will do this by considering a member of the family/relative, or friend (connected person) at each stage of the decision-making process during any legal proceedings or assessment in relation to the Looked After Child providing this is commensurate with the timescales for securing permanency for the child

Looked After Young people placed with family and friends who are care leavers are entitled to leaving care support at the same level as other young people leaving care in order to support their transition into adulthood.

Wishes and Feelings of the Child or Young Person

The assessment for temporary and full approval of family and friends as foster carers includes the requirement that the wishes and views of the child or young person, the birth family and the carer's immediate and extended family, where relevant are sought as part of the planning process and that they be taken into account when making the final recommendations. Children tell us: "Try family and friends but assess first"; and "use the same judgement when moving us to live with another family member as social workers would when moving us to a foster carer."

Many children benefit from placements with family and friends, however not all relatives are able to safeguard and promote a child's welfare and their

parenting capacity will be rigorously assessed before approval as a local authority foster carer.

The Legal Framework

To enable relatives, friends or other persons connected to the child to care for a child who is Looked After, they must be approved as foster carers under the 2011 Fostering Service Regulations or temporarily approved under Regulation 24/25 2010 Care Planning Placement and Case Review Regulations and then subsequently approved under the 2011 Fostering Service Regulations. The regulations cover temporary/emergency, short term, and long term approvals.

Permanence

Children should not remain in public care for longer than is necessary to plan for permanent security. At any stage of the assessment process or thereafter whilst the child is living with the carers, where it is considered in the child's best interest and will promote their welfare and secure permanency, consideration will be given to supporting the carers to apply for an appropriate legal order giving them parental responsibility through a Residence Order, Special Guardianship Order or Adoption Order.

A Residence Order means that the carer will have day to day care of the child and will share responsibility for some important decisions about the child with their birth parents.

When a Special Guardianship Order is in place, although the birth parents may continue to be part of the children's lives, the Special Guardian has the authority to make decisions about the child without involving them.

An Adoption Order severs the legal ties between the child and their birth parent and the child becomes the child of the adopters

We continue to offer support services to families where these orders are in place. A Permanence Support Plan is drawn up by the Family Plus Team and where it is agreed that services are needed, that plan will be reviewed every year with the family.

Assessment and Approval

The National minimum Standards (13) for Fostering Services 2011 requires that people, who express an interest in becoming foster carers, are treated fairly, without prejudice and with respect.

The Standard also requires that prospective foster carers should be considered in terms of their capacity to look after children in a safe and responsible way that meets their developmental needs.

In all circumstances, where the proposed carer is the most appropriate placement and where it meets the child's needs as identified in the child's

care plan, the carer will be assessed and approved as a temporary foster carer before the child is placed.

Emergency Assessment and Temporary Approval as a Foster Carer under Regulation 24

If the child has to be placed with a relative, friend or connected person in an emergency and it is not possible to carry out a full assessment, the carer will be temporarily approved for 16 weeks (or in exceptional specified circumstances 24 weeks) provided Wandsworth Council has:

- Ascertained key information about the proposed carers and members of their household before the placement or if not possible, immediately afterwards (Regulation 24(2) of the Care Planning, Placement and Care Review Regulations (2010)); and
- Made arrangements, where required, to carry out a full fostering assessment by a social worker under the Fostering /Service Regulations 2011 and taking into account the Fostering Service National Minimum standards 2011.

The carer will be required to agree to a written plan for the child outlining their responsibilities. They will also be subject to the Foster Carers Agreement which outlines their responsibilities as a council approved carer.

Children will only be placed in an emergency with a connected person where it is in the child's best interests and where the child has to be looked after and placed that day and where there has been insufficient time to complete a full assessment under Fostering Service Regulations 2011.

This temporary approval only lasts for up to 16 weeks and early consideration must be given to arranging a full fostering assessment if required within specified timescales. Where the full assessment is not completed within 16 weeks (or in exceptional cases 24 weeks if an extension has been applied for) from the date of temporary approval, or the outcome of the assessment is negative, then the child must be moved from the placement. However, the persons assessed can challenge the decision not to approve them as carers (The Qualifying Determination) and the child can remain with them during this period.

Placement of child/young person with a connected person.

When a child/young person cannot live with either of their birth parents it is preferable that the child/young person continues to live within their extended family or another connected person with whom they have a significant relationship unless this is not consistent with their welfare

When the child/young person is known to the department, and a member of the family, or other connected person, wishes to care for the child/young person it is essential that there is clarity about the legal basis of that

arrangement. That is whether the arrangement and any support from the department are subject to Section 17 or Section 20 of the Children Act. That clarity needs to be endorsed by a Senior Manager.

The Head of Service or Service Manager must be notified in advance of any support being negotiated with the family. The Head of Service or Service Manager will, on the basis of evidence and a recommendation from the social worker, decide and record on the Child's Record the route which the Department is taking.

When Wandsworth Council has decided a child must be looked after potential Family and Friends carers are always considered first. Placements must be approved under the Fostering Regulations. If this is an emergency placement the agreement to continue with the arrangements requires the agreement of the Head of Service (Family and Community) – the 'nominated officer'.

The full procedure and guidance are contained in Wandsworth's procedure for "Temporary approval of a Connected Person"

Planned Assessment as a Foster Carer under Fostering Service Regulations

Where possible, placements should be planned to enable a thorough and full assessment of the proposed carer under Fostering Service Regulations. In some circumstances the local authority may carry out a viability assessment of the proposed carers in order to ascertain whether they will be able to meet the child's assessed needs and can proceed for a full assessment as foster carers under Fostering Service Regulations. In Wandsworth the assessing social worker for the full Fostering assessment will use BAAF Form "C" and accompanying guidance to ensure that with reference to the child's care plan and permanence plan, a full assessment is carried out which demonstrates the carer's capacity to meet the specific child's needs in a safe and responsible way for the duration of the proposed placement whether this is short or long term.

The proposed carer must undergo and satisfy certain specified statutory checks and references before approval can be recommended. The Form C is a competency-based assessment which allows the assessor to focus on the specific needs of the child or children concerned whilst assessing the carer's skills and qualities against the required standards (National Minimum Fostering Standards, standard 30, 2011).

The assessment will balance the experiences and strengths of the carer against any aspects which might make them less suitable. The needs of the child will be kept central as the process of the assessment will also be to match the child to the carer. On completion of the full assessment the carer will be considered for approval by Wandsworth's Fostering Panel in relation to the specific child or children they are connected to. The panel will make a recommendation to the Agency Decision Maker.

Carers have recourse to seek review of the approval decision either directly to the Agency Decision Maker or to the Independent Reviewing Mechanism within 28 days.

Supporting Contact

Most Looked After Children living with members of their extended family will be in contact with one or both of their parents and with other relatives and such contact is generally a positive experience in that it helps them to maintain a sense of identity and belonging.

Wandsworth Council has a responsibility to promote contact for Looked After Children with their parents, relatives or anyone connected to the child unless it is not reasonably practicable or consistent with their welfare.

Contact will be carefully managed, monitored and supported for Looked After Children placed with family and friends carers and any need for additional support identified at the child's review or during the foster carer's supervision sessions and Annual Foster Carer Review. In some circumstances, contact will be facilitated and supervised by the Contact Service subject to review. All family and friends foster carers are made aware of their role in promoting contact, in particular their role in supporting, arranging and facilitating contact with the child's birth family where this may not be considered safe or in the child's interests. The need for any ongoing support or support services, especially in relation to managing contact for children will also be identified in the assessment and addressed in the foster carers' subsequent supervisions sessions and annual reviews chaired by an Independent Reviewing Officer.

Ongoing support

Throughout the assessment process whether for temporary approval or approval under Fostering Service Regulations, family and friends foster carers with children in placement will be supported by a named allocated supervising social worker, and the child will be supported by the child's social worker.

Many of the issues that go with being a family and friends carer are likely to be the same whether or not the carers are approved as foster carers. Being a foster carer brings with it additional obligations and responsibilities which have to be met.

The child's social worker is responsible for the child's care plan and the allocated supervising social worker is responsible for supervising the carer but both have a responsibility for ensuring that the carer exercises delegated authority within the overall framework of the care plan and the placement plan and that the carer demonstrates that they are meeting the child's needs as set out in the plans and the foster carers' agreement.

The foster carer must be clear about their role in relation to consents for the child in particular their role in supporting, arranging and facilitating contact

with the child's birth family where this may not be considered safe or in the child's interests.

Training and Development of the Family and Friends Foster Carers

All family and friends foster carers temporarily approved or fully approved under Fostering Service Regulations are in all respects foster carers and entitled to the same level of training and support as unrelated foster carers including relevant fostering allowances.

All family and friend foster carers will be supported by a named allocated supervising social worker who will be responsible for the foster carer's support, supervision, training and development.

Family and friends foster carers temporarily approved or fully approved will sign a Foster Care Agreement which details the expectation of the carer to meet Fostering Service Regulations and Fostering National Minimum Standards and the level and type of support from Wandsworth Fostering Service.

On approval, family and friends foster carers will receive a copy of the current Foster Carers' Handbook and have access to other information available for carers or for Children Looked After.

Wandsworth Fostering Service ensures that all family and friends foster carers temporarily or fully approved will receive support which is equivalent to that provided for unrelated carers including the child's related fostering allowances.

Training and Support Groups

Wandsworth Fostering Service will ensure that family and friend foster carers have access to family and friends preparation groups, and support in order to achieve the Children's Workforce Development Council's Training, Support and Development Standards within 18 months of approval (CWDCTSD). Future training and development needs will be identified with the carer by the supervising social worker and recorded in the carer's Personal Professional Development Plan. Separate family and friends support groups are arranged to address the needs of family and friends carers.

Wandsworth's Family and Friends Assessment Guide provides details of the assessment, approval, allowances and support of family and friends carers and is available to family and friends carers temporarily approved or being assessed for approval as foster carers or special guardians.

The Role of Wandsworth Foster Care Association (WFCA)

Newly approved family and friend foster carers have the same access as recruited foster carers to independent advice and consultancy from Wandsworth Foster Care Association. The association advises and advocates

on behalf of foster carers in all areas of the fostering task and specifically to carers who have had an allegation or complaint made against them and will support carers who wish to make a complaint.

Local Support

Family Information Service

Offer information and assistance on finding childcare, support services for families and activities for children and young people aged from birth to 20 years old.

The service is a telephone, email and internet service

Telephone: 0208 871 7899

Visit: www.wandsworth.gov.uk/fis

Email: Fis@wandsworth.gov.uk

Wandsworth Fostering Service

Welbeck House

Wandsworth High Street

London SW18 2PU

0208 871 6666

www.wandsworth.gov.uk/fostering

Wandsworth Citizens Advice Bureaux

215 Balham High Road

London SW17 7BQ

Wandsworth Housing Department

17-27 Garratt Lane

London Wandsworth SW18 4AE

Telephone: 0208 871 6840

Complaints

All carers are encouraged to discuss any complaint or dissatisfaction about the service with their social worker so that the complaint can be resolved informally. However, if the matter cannot be resolved the formal complaint procedure can be used.

A copy of the complaint leaflet is available to all carers and children.

Wandsworth Council

Town Hall

Wandsworth high Street

London SW18 2PU

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